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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, June 9, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "KEEPING UP APPEARANCES." Information from Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publications available, Farmers' Bulletin 1738-F, Farmhouse Plans, and 1749-F, Modernizing Farmhouses.

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We've all heard stories of pathetic people living on their past family reputation, who kept up a fine front and ate bread and tea behind the scenes. That's not what I mean when I take "Keeping up Appearances" for my topic today. I mean proper maintenance of the home, - in particular, the farm home, - to slow down depreciation.

I've just had a talk with one of the housing engineers of the U. S. Department of Agriculture who took part in that study I reported to you a few weeks ago. You'll remember, I think, that in four states, - Kansas, Wisconsin, Georgia and Illinois, - investigators discovered many farm homes in a deplorable state of depreciation. They believed their findings were typical of most rural areas. Some of the houses, they said, were in such bad shape they were beyond repair. Others could be saved by immediate attention to the worst features.

According to Farmers' Bulletin 1738-F, Farmhouse Plans, - (and I might add that a new edition of this publication is just off the press) - a well-built farmhouse should last for 60 years or more. In the ordinary course of events, at least two generations of children will be brought up in it. Depreciation, therefore, should amount to less than 2 percent a year. And good maintenance will check the rate of depreciation very definitely.

The agricultural engineer who talked to me said that if major improvements were not contemplated at present, there was still crying need for better general maintenance, and that much could be done without a large outlay of cash. Homes could be safeguarded from further depreciation and made weather-tight, warm, and comfortable to live in, if the members of the family would just undertake them a step at a time as other work permits.

For instance, a few nails will tighten siding where looseness will soon mean serious damage. Window frames can be made firm, solid, and rain-proof. Sagging floors can be jacked up and reinforced. Rough floors can be planed and sandpapered, then refinished. Outside steps are often weather-rotted, but are easily repaired, and should be attended to for the sake of safety. Inside stairs may need only a hand-rail and a better light to make them safe. Missing shingles and chimney flashings can be put back to prevent leaks in the roof. Gutters and downspouts may be made to last longer by cleaning and painting. Chimneys can be made safer by repairing loose mortar joints and thorough cleaning. Inexpensive weather-stripping can be nailed around windows and outside door frames. Insulating

6/9/38

material can be spread over unprotected ceilings and greatly improve the warmth of the house in winter, and lessen the fuel bill, as well as make the house cooler in summer. Exposed surfaces both outside and indoors can be painted to very much improve appearances.

The bulletin I just mentioned, Number 1738-F, is intended primarily for those who are planning to build new homes, but it contains among its 40 floor plans and illustrations a great many suggestions for those who wish chiefly to improve their present houses. Ideas along this line are also found in Farmers' Bulletin 1749-F, Modernizing Farmhouses. In both of these publications interior arrangements have been checked by experts for convenience, economy of space and general livability. A study of them may reveal some way in which one's rooms could be rearranged with no expense to make for greater comfort. Possibly some of the wear and tear in one part of the house is due to the continual use of a certain door for entry, or to the necessity of having people pass through the work area, or do work in unsuitable places. With such difficulties corrected, further damage to the parts of the house involved may be averted. For example, I know a woman whose icebox drain sometimes overflowed and damaged the wall of the cellar stairs directly below it. By moving the refrigerator to the other side of the room, and installing a larger size pipe to drain it and carry the water away from the house walls, this damage was eliminated. But not until she had paid a five dollar plasterer's bill!

If your house is one of the many built 30 to 40 years ago, you probably need more closets than were originally put in the house. Closets and storage places often serve a double purpose. They not only keep the wardrobe and household possessions in order but they strengthen partitions and deaden sounds between rooms. On the cold side of the house they may act as insulation.

There are many ways of using built-in conveniences to take the place of outworn furniture. Some of them are mentioned in Farmers' Bulletin 1738. I intend to devote a whole talk to this subject in the near future. This bulletin also contains references to building materials of different kinds. It may be that part of a badly depreciated house could be saved by using some inexpensive local materials you have not thought of, such as field stone, lumber from the farm wood lot, or from a building that should be torn down.

Such major changes as putting in a water system or electric lighting or building on additional rooms may call for more of an outlay than seems possible at present, but meantime lesser improvements can be made a step at a time, by members of the family, as other work permits.

Farmers' Bulletin 1738-F costs ten cents, and 1749-F, five cents. Both can be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

